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DE RUEHIN #0439/01 0860853
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 260853Z MAR 08
FM AIT TAIPEI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8550
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 8078
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 9332

UNCLAS AIT TAIPEI 000439

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DEPARTMENT PASS AIT/WASHINGTON

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: AFTERMATH OF TAIWAN'S PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTION

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused their news coverage March 26 on the aftermath of Taiwan's presidential election last Saturday, including the caretaker government's plans before president-elect Ma Ying-jeou's inauguration on May 20; possible personnel arrangements for the new cabinet and the defeated DPP, respectively; the White House's and State Department's responses to Ma's wish to visit the U.S.; and the U.S. government's expectations for future cross-Straits relations, as spelled out by State Department Taiwan Affairs Coordinator Douglas Spelman Tuesday. Also, almost all papers reported on a Pentagon announcement Monday, which said it had mistakenly shipped non-nuclear ballistic missile components to Taiwan in 2006, thinking they were helicopter batteries that Taiwan had ordered.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an op-ed in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" said that both sides across the Strait are likely to deal with economic issues first after Ma takes the helm on May 20, while political issues will remain unresolved because of their complexity and sensitivity. An op-ed in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times," written by a western writer based in Taipei, discussed the developments of cross-Straits relations in the wake of Ma's inauguration. The article said "armament/disarmament in the Taiwan Strait is becoming increasingly intertwined with the greater dynamics of the regional arms race, pitting the U.S. and its allies in Northeast Asia against China." A "Taipei Times" editorial, on the other hand, called on Ma to push for a Cabinet proposal seeking a legislative resolution on Taiwan's bid to join the UN. End summary.

A) "It Bodes Well for [Future] Economic [Interactions] but Ill for Political [Relations] across the Taiwan Strait"

Barry Chen, a professor at the Graduate Institute of American Studies of Chinese Culture University and a visiting scholar at Beijing Union University, opined in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 520,000] (3/26):

"Ma Ying-jeou's landslide victory and the failed passage of the UN referenda, with which Beijing was highly concerned, have greatly inspired the cross-Straits peaceful development roadmap advocated by [Chinese President] Hu Jintao. [Beijing's] major burdens and doubts have been removed, even though Beijing's official reaction has been low-profile and cautious. Beijing is waiting to see what Ma Ying-jeou will announce in his May 20 inauguration speech and pay attention to staff appointments on Ma's national security team, including mainland affairs, foreign affairs and defense, then make a formal and complete response. However, Beijing has noticed that Ma Ying-jeou has said several times in local and international press conferences that he will use the 1992 consensus as the basis for cross-Straits negotiations, and both sides [across the Strait] will have different interpretations of the one-China principle. [Ma's] remarks at least have reduced Beijing's worries. The circumstances

are definitely better than the time when Chen Shui-bian was elected in 2000. ...

"Ma Ying-jeou's first priority after taking office is to deal with the issues of the economy and people's livelihood. The Chinese Communists' 17th [CPC National Congress] has also emphasized that social [matters] and people's livelihood problems are the first administrative priorities. As a result, both sides across the Strait will enter into an interactive model of "economy first; politics later." It is unlikely that Ma's ideas can come to fruition in his initiatives in the short or mid-term, including terminating the hostile footing, peaceful negotiations, a "ceasefire" in foreign affairs, and establishing military confidence-building measures. It is because these issues are all wrapped up in complicated issues such as the constitution, sovereignty and territory, national character, security and interests. Each sides [across the Strait] has its own calculation and its own internal pressures. How could it be easy? ...

"... History is giving both authorities a window of opportunity. [We] should seize the opportunity. However, a gradual but not rapid or impetuous way is safer and sounder than a swift way for courting success. It also assures long-term peace."

B) "Washington Celebrates, but Others Are Fretful"

J. Michael Cole, a writer based in Taipei, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (3/26):

"Given the recent tensions between President Chen Shui-bian and US President George W. Bush and the US State Department's vociferous opposition to Taiwan's referendums on joining the UN, if does not come as a surprise that Washington would welcome the win on Saturday by Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) candidate Ma Ying-jeou, who has been portrayed as less of a 'troublemaker' than Chen or Democratic ELECTION

Progressive Party candidate Frank Hsieh. But no sooner had the last ballot been counted than a handful of US conservatives were raising the specter of some rapprochement between Taipei and Beijing (an 'unhealthy pro-China' stance,' one called it). Among them and responsible for the above quote was Dan Blumenthal, a former Pentagon official, who questioned what the KMT win would mean to the US-Taiwan alliance. He recommended that Bush's legacy to Taiwan be ensuring that Taiwan receives the F-16 fighter aircraft it has been prevented from buying, as well as diesel submarines, among other items.

"What this shows us, less than 24 hours after the vote, is that the conservatives in Washington do not see the prospect of less tension in the Taiwan Strait favorably, as this could threaten: one, the US alliance with Taiwan, in which the latter is increasingly starting to look (at least from Beijing's perspective) like it is part of the master plan to contain and encircle China to ensure that it does not reach regional, of not global, primacy, and two, those in the US defense establishment who stand to profit from continued weapons sales to Taiwan. ... Blumenthal and others may not be wrong in their assessment that a Ma presidency is unlikely to change much in the Taiwan Strait conflict -- I agree with that position -- but their immediate reflex to worry about arms sales even before attempts at some form of peace talks have been made shows where their true priorities lie. ...

"What this means is that armament/disarmament in the Taiwan Strait is becoming increasingly intertwined with the greater dynamics of the regional arms race pitting the US and its allies in Northeast Asia against China. The more Taiwan is seen to be part of the encirclement of China (much as the 'new democracy' Kosovo, which, now that Washington will be selling it weapons, will be part of the encirclement of Russia), the more difficult it will be resolve the question of Taiwan peacefully, regardless of who is in office in Taipei,"

C) "Ma Should Heed EU Lawmakers' Call"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (3/26):

"Last Wednesday, 100 members of the European Parliament reiterated their support for Taiwan's bid to join the UN. The news was largely overshadowed by election fever in the final days of campaigning, despite the strength of the statement in the "European Voice," an independent newspaper that documents EU developments, and the fact that Taiwan was preparing to vote on two referendum proposals concerning UN membership. The parliamentarians went further than acknowledging the long-ignored fact that Beijing's seat at the UN does not represent Taiwan's people and interests. Their statement said Taiwan has never been controlled by the People's Republic of China and that it is a sovereign country. ...

"The statement by EU lawmakers reflected the principles that the countries they represent so often tout -- equal representation, an integral aspect of democracy and human rights. The governments of those same countries, meanwhile, remain silent on the issue of Taiwan, or else toe Beijing's line. Taiwan cannot afford to echo that silence. The nation has missed a chance to make itself heard and now must focus on minimizing the damage. It must not leave this heartening statement by EU parliamentarians unanswered. As president-elect Ma Ying-jeou nears his inauguration date, he should consider how to make up for this loss. The cards are stacked in Ma's favor. He will have an absolute majority in the legislature ready to back any Cabinet proposal. And in light of statements he and his party made in the months leading to the election, failing to take action could only be interpreted as duplicitous.

"Topping the agenda for Ma becoming president should be a Cabinet proposal for a legislative resolution underscoring what EU parliamentarians so eloquently proclaimed last week: Taiwan is not the People's Republic of China. As such, it is denied representation at the UN but should continue to seek to break out of its international isolation. These statements that are not controversial in Taiwan and the legislature should pass them unanimously. The issue of the nation's ideal title at the UN is not vital to a legislative proposal. Unnecessary controversy should be avoided in favor of garnering a unanimous vote that would amplify the resolution's significance in light of the legislature's fierce divide. ..."

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